

Israel's Place in the Plan of God
 The Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120—134
 by Dr. David L. Cooper

Psalm 120

The Plight of The Russian Jews

The songs of Ascents, fifteen in number, hold a unique position in the Psalter. They are Psalms 120—134. Various theories have been advanced by scholars in interpreting the significance of these psalms. The word "ascents" is what its name implies in English, namely, "goings up." What "goings up" are indicated? It is a fact well known by all who are familiar with Palestine that it is a mountainous country, there being a ridge, or backbone, of mountains running throughout the length and breadth of the country, with the exception of the break which is made by the Plain of Esdraelon. Israel was in Egypt, as we learn in the latter part of the Books of Genesis and Exodus. In their leaving Egypt and coming to the Land of Promise the children of Israel went *up* literally. Again, when they went into Babylonian captivity, they were in a low, level land. In their leaving that land and returning to their homeland, they went up into the mountainous country. Some scholars think that these two historical incidences furnished the material for the title, "Songs of Ascents." But an examination of these fifteen psalms shows that that is not the general theme of the songs. It is true that Psalm 126 is based upon Israel's return from Babylon to Palestine, but none other of the fifteen psalms refers to this.

Other scholars, with greater probability, have assumed that the word, ascents, refers to Israel's going up to Jerusalem (which was in the high mountains of Judea) at the three annual feasts. There can be no doubt that the thought of going up to Jerusalem is prominent in this collection of psalms. But, at least it seems to me, that thought does not predominate sufficiently in this collection of hymns to justify the title, ascents. There are still other scholars who think that these fifteen psalms were composed to be sung upon the flight of fifteen steps leading from the outer court to the inner court of the Temple. According to faint echoes found here and there in the Talmud and Midrashic literature of the Jewish rabbis, the theory is advanced that one of these songs was sung upon each of this flight of fifteen steps. The historical information is so very scanty that it is impossible for us to accept this as an indication of its meaning.

Still other students of the Word think that we are to interpret the word ascents spiritually and understand that these songs are speaking of progress and development in the spiritual life. In that event, this development is spoken of in terms of scaling some heights. An examination of the psalms shows that there are indicated in these hymns growth and development spiritually. Concerning this proposition there can be no doubt. But the difficulty with this theory is that it is too general and indefinite.

The explanation which seems to coincide with all of the facts as they appear in this collection of psalms is that our term, ascents, speaks of Israel's return to God and restoration to fellowship with the Almighty in terms of the Jews' going up from all parts of the land to Jerusalem to appear before Jehovah and to worship Him there. When all of these psalms are studied, it will be seen that they deal specifically with the return of Israel to God and restoration to the land and to spiritual communion with Him. When he does these things, he will become the channel of world blessing, being no longer the tail of the nations, but the head.

With this general survey of the songs of ascents in mind, let us now turn specifically to the first one, Psalm 120, and study its message.

As the subtitle of this article indicates, this psalm deals with the situation of the Russian Jews. The words of this song are as follows:

1. In my distress I cried unto Jehovah, And he answered me.
2. Deliver my soul, O Jehovah, from lying lips, And from a deceitful tongue.
3. What shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done more unto thee,
Thou deceitful tongue?
4. Sharp arrows of the mighty, With coals of juniper.
5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, That I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6. My soul hath long had her dwelling With him that hateth peace.
7. I am for peace: But when I speak, they are for war.

A glance at this hymn shows that the pronouns of the first person are used throughout. As to who the human author was, we do not know. While we would like to know, this knowledge is not essential to a proper understanding of the passage. From verse 5 it is clear that the writer identifies himself with the Jews who live in Moscow, Russia, and also in Kedar, which was in the general region lying between the Caspian and Black Seas. These facts immediately show that the standpoint of the writer is that of one who has lived for a long time in that unfortunate country. What! Did Jews, during the time when God was speaking through the prophets, live in Russia? We have nothing to that effect. In fact, all the testimony that we have points in the opposite direction. In view of this fact, then, we must interpret Psalm 120 in the light of a well-known principle employed by the prophets. Very, very frequently the prophets were taken from their own time, in vision, to some subsequent era. Not only were they carried forward over the centuries to some future time; but, in vision, were carried to some certain country or countries; and spoke just as if they were living in said land, or lands, at the future time indicated by the facts of the context. A perusal of the psalms and the messages of the prophets shows that this was a customary method employed by the prophets. Thus we may conclude that the psalmist, whoever he was, in vision and by the Spirit of God, was carried forward to the very close of the present age and was transported in his vision up to Russia and became the spokesman for the unfortunate Russian Jews of the present era.

A Prayer for Deliverance

In verses 1-4 the psalmist, by the Spirit of God, enters into the experiences of the poor suffering Russian Jews of the present time and leads them in a petition as they plead for deliverance from the all but unbearable bondage and slavery in which they are held.

In verse 1 the author states that he had been in distress, but had called upon God and that the Lord had answered prayer by delivering him. It is a wonderful thing to have dealings with God and to look to Him for complete deliverance from all troubles. The Almighty is a prayer-answering God.

In verse 2 appears the prayer which the Russian Jews will make before the Almighty. They will realize the satanic deceitfulness of the propaganda machine of the Russian Government. Thus they will pray to be delivered "... from lying lips, *And* from a deceitful tongue." According to news reports the fundamental basic principle of the Soviet Government is that of deception and lying. The Russians have had a cold war

on for years and doubtless will continue it. The gains that they have made have been largely brought about by their deceitful propaganda.

Continuing his prophecy, the writer of Psalm 120 turns directly to a future ruler of Russia and asks him this question:

3. What shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done more unto thee,
Thou deceitful tongue?"

If we take this statement and change it from a question into a declarative statement, we shall see that it is in the regular form of oaths that were taken by the Jews during Old Testament times. As an example of this, may I call attention to the following oath, the one which Eli swore in talking to little Samuel: "... God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that he spake unto thee" (I Sam. 3:17). Our psalm-writer puts his oath in the form of a question asking, "What shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done more unto thee ...?" The usual answer to such an oath is, as indicated in the words of Eli: "... God do so to thee, and more also ..." Thus God is the one who arbitrates, and who acts. This point must be kept clearly in mind, as we proceed.

This language is addressed to one who is deceitful: "... Thou deceitful tongue?" While we recognize that the recent rulers of Russia have had deceitful tongues, this is not addressed to them, but to a successor who will suffer under the mighty titanic strokes of the Almighty. Who is this one? When we turn to Ezekiel 38:1—39:16, we see that the leader, or commander, of Russia at the time of that nation's invasion of Palestine is none other than Gog, who will meet the Almighty in Palestine, and who will be overthrown by Him. In the light of these facts, I am confident that the one addressed in verse 3 of Psalm 120 is none other than Gog, the ruler of Russia at the time of the future invasion described in Ezekiel. Ezekiel's prophecy should be studied very, very carefully in this connection. Psalm 120 is the poetical version of the prophecy of Ezekiel 38:1—39:16.

3. What shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done more unto thee,
Thou deceitful tongue?"

The answer to this question is found in verse 4:

4. Sharp arrows of the mighty, With coals of juniper.

As there are two parts to the question—"What shall be given unto thee," and, "... what shall be done more unto thee"—the answer is given in two parts: First, sharp arrows of the mighty shall be given; secondly, coals of juniper shall be hurled upon him.

Since in the oaths God was always the subject who acts, and since verse four is the answer to the question put in the form of an oath, God is the one who is to be understood as the one acting. In the light of these facts, we are forced to conclude that the one designated "the mighty" is none other than the Almighty, who shoots the sharp arrows at this future deceitful propagandist of Russia. In interpreting Ezekiel 38:1—39:16 I wrote a book of 116 pages entitled, [*When Gog's Armies Meet the Almighty*](#). When Russia, with the satellite nations invades Palestine by sending a great aerial armada against it, she will meet the Almighty as a warrior, who will overthrow all of her forces. Thus the Lord, in this passage, is represented as the Mighty One who shoots His arrows at the enemy, and who deluges them with coals of Juniper, very

hot embers. When we read Ezekiel 39:6 we see that at the time of the overthrow of the Russian hosts in Palestine, there will also be the raining of fire and brimstone from heaven upon Russia to destroy her war potential and to liquidate all her armed forces. Thus we see in Psalm 120:4 the complete annihilation of the armed forces of Russia and her accomplices behind the iron curtain.

The Miserable, Pitiable Condition of The Russian Jews

In verse 5 our author enters sympathetically into the miserable plight of the Russian Jews of the present time and exclaims:

5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, That I dwell among the tents of Kedar!"

Woe and misery have overtaken and continues to pursue the Jews who are in that very unfortunate land, and who have been there since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

The psalmist, continuing to speak for the unfortunate Russian Jews, declares:

6. My soul hath long had her dwelling with him that hateth peace."

The clause, "that hateth peace," certainly does describe the Russian regime perfectly. They hate peace! The Russian Government hates peace and is doing everything in its power to foment trouble and chaos throughout the world in order that they might bring the entire world under their domination. The author, continuing, says:

7. I am for peace: But when I speak, they are for war.

Literally the psalmist said: "I am peace," peace being the dominant characteristic of the Jew in Russia. He wants to live in peace and desires to pursue life, happiness, and contentment. Whenever he expresses himself, according to this psalm, for peace, then the authorities are for war. The Russian Gestapo is on his heels and realizes everything that is thought and expressed by the people. The Jews, therefore, are against all who are for war.

When the Russians invade Palestine in fulfillment of Ezekiel 38:1—39:16, then the remnant of the Jews in Russia will have an opportunity to return to the land of their forefathers. They long for peace and for an opportunity to worship the God of their fathers. May that golden era of peace soon come to Israel and the world! It will come only when the Jewish people repudiate the national sin of rejecting Messiah and plead for Him to come back. When they thus right-about-face, He will hear their cry, come back to this earth, and deliver them.